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Preparing Colorado Educators to Partner with Families in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

FINAL REPORT

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Abstract

In 2009, Colorado's Department of Education (CDE) received a State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities through the development of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports that integrates Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) efforts across the state. The present project is associated with one of the seven goals of this multiyear grant, specifically Objective 5.5, which focuses on increasing future educators' meaningful participation with families in this statewide reform initiative. A survey was developed to assess current educator preparation in regards to engaging parents/families and to identify possible next steps to guide future CDE professional development efforts. The survey was sent to the directors of 43 Colorado Institutions of Higher Education (CO IHEs) accredited to prepare future educators. While the number of total faculty respondents was small (N=38), at least one response was obtained from 63% of the identified departments, which can provide guidance for how to support future educator preparation for family-school partnering associated with this initiative. Results indicated that currently educators learn about working with families through the infusion of related information into existing courses and that the most commonly presented topics include *building relationships*, *creating welcoming environments* and *working with diverse families*. Recommendations for future venues and practices regarding family-school partnership coursework, experiences, and desired resources are forwarded based on reported preferences.

Preparing Colorado Educators to Partner with Families in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports

Comprehensive system change and a national shift in perspective have strongly influenced the need for educators to partner with families to improve educational outcomes for all children. A brief review is provided of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) recently awarded to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) as part of a state-wide systems change effort to foster a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework. Critical aspects of the current national shift to engage families in education also are described. This review is followed by a summary of the current research project that was designed to assess how future educational professionals in Colorado are currently prepared to partner with families. The results of a survey sent to faculty at all accredited Colorado Institutions of Higher Education preparing future educators are reviewed and potential next steps to improve family school partnerships in Colorado are forwarded.

The CO SPDG: Comprehensive Systems Change

State Personnel Development Grants (SPDGs) are distributed by the U.S. Department of Education to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities through funding and technical assistance that advance systems of professional development and personnel preparation. In 2009, the Colorado State Department of Education received five years of SPDG funding to address systems change in schools within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework that integrates Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) efforts across the state. This framework had recently been adopted in Colorado to enhance targeted educational support leading to improved learning outcomes for students with disabilities. The meaningful participation of families is an essential aspect of this endeavor as noted in Objective 5, one of the seven major objectives outlined in the current CO SPDG:

1. Support the changing roles and practices of personnel serving students with disabilities;
2. Implement a regional model of technical assistance and support;
3. Implement the Early Childhood Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social Emotional Development of Infants and Young Children in early childhood programs;

4. Design and replicate model ASD/SNN programs that improve academic and social/emotional competences of students with disabilities;
5. *Increase the meaningful participation of families in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (RtI and PBIS implementation in LEAs);*
6. Utilize a continuous feedback loop for reflection on practices, policies, and evaluation;
7. Improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of students with disabilities.

The completed work addressed in this report falls under the fifth goal. The overarching outcome associated with this goal is that Colorado will improve the meaningful participation of families of students with disabilities in school systems in order to ensure that every child is reaching his/her potential. Each of the identified SPDG goals has several associated objectives. There are six specific objectives for Goal 5:

- 5.1 Increase parent/family membership on school teams;
- 5.2 Train parent/family members and community members on RtI and PBIS;
- 5.3 Train principals and teachers in how to communicate and partner with families;
- 5.4 Partner with parent/family and community partnership organizations to support TACs in providing training;
- 5.5 *Train future professionals on the importance of involving parents/families in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (RtI and PBIS);*
- 5.6 Involve parents/family members in the evaluation of the SPDG;

Specifically, the research summarized in this report was undertaken in order to further objective 5.5 which is focused on the pre-service preparation of future educators.

The Shift to Family-School Partnering Practices

In the last decade, several important factors have contributed to a shift in the ways that families and schools work together to ensure positive student outcomes. Increasingly clear mandates have been forwarded in federal legislation that families must be viewed as equal partners in the schooling process (Lines, Miller & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). A clear statutory definition of parental involvement was included in No Child Left Behind: “*Participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication*

involving student academic learning; assisting in their child's learning, and serving as full partners in their child's education" (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004). Numerous sections of IDEA 2004 indicate that education for children with disabilities must "*strengthen the role and responsibility of parents and ensure that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home*" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004, 20 U.S.C. 1401(c)(5)(B)). Both of these laws also mandate accountability for student outcomes, using research-based best practices.

In addition to mandates outlined in federal educational legislation, there is now a heightened awareness of the past 40 years of research on such practices. This work clearly supports the contention that family-school partnering contributes to improved outcomes, not only for students but also for educators and families (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Programs and interventions that explicitly engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Esler, Godber and Christenson (2008) recently summarized these findings as: (a) better student attendance and attitudes toward school, increased homework completion, and higher academic achievement; (b) enhanced morale and job satisfaction ratings among educators and more positive overall school evaluations; and (c) greater parental knowledge about school expectations and confidence in their ability to academically support their children. Other key partnering research findings related to effective educator practices include the following:

- During the school years, students spend 70% of their waking hours outside of school (Clarke, 1990);
- Families want their children to succeed in school and desire information as to their role (Christenson, 1995);
- Generalization and sustainability of learning occurs when families are involved (Sheridan, 1997);
- Students benefit in multiple ways from partnering, beginning in the early years and extending through secondary levels; this includes those who experience differences in culture, language, learning, and economic resources (Jeynes, 2005, 2007).

These findings have strengthened the call for integrated, strategic family engagement approaches designed to have a direct impact on student achievement and school performance. The current calls are contrasted with prior family involvement efforts that typically serve as “random acts” of various programs disconnected from instruction (Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010). Key aspects of this shift, from a traditional view of family involvement, to a strategic emphasis on family engagement and partnering, are summarized in Table 1 (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). (Insert Table 1.)

Table 1: Shift from Traditional Family Involvement to Family-School Partnering

TRADITIONAL FAMILY INVOLVEMENT	FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family, which includes student, parents and/or other caregivers in a child’s life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools have the primary responsibility for educating students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and schools share responsibility for a child’s education; each has unique knowledge and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-initiated, formal activities and meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible hours and meeting venues; ongoing sustainable relationship-building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School-initiated, one-way information sharing, often about problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing, two-way communication about successes, concerns, information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational plans developed and implemented by school and shared with parents; parents give consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational plans developed and delivered conjointly by schools and families, including RtI, ILP, ALP, FBA/BIP and IEP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured volunteering at school (usually fundraising events) with a small group of parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting learning at home and school for all families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a student struggles, teachers tend to “go it alone”, then refer to child study group/special education if continuing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a student struggles, families and teachers work together, then refer to a problem-solving team, including families and teachers, which

<p>problems; families “sign consent” and the special education team tests for eligibility</p>	<p>prescribes interventions and monitors progress; and considers special education eligibility whenever a disability is suspected</p>
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National Trends in Preparing Educators to Partner with Families

With the increased knowledge of family-school partnering influences on student achievement and the paradigm practice shift, researchers have begun to focus on how future educators are prepared to successfully enact such practices (Casper, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011). This is a challenging area of study due to the variability in state educator licensing requirements, institutional coursework and administrative structures (Chavkin, 2005) as well as to numerous challenges in the higher education system, including crowded curricula, departmental and faculty independence, the difficulty of institutional change, and faculty attitudes (Epstein, Sanders, & Clark, 1999). However, several important findings have emerged:

- Teachers report that they enter classrooms unprepared to engage families (Markow & Pietrow, 2009) and even supervising and seasoned teachers are unaware of current research and effective practices (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010a);
- More partnering training tends to be offered to future teachers in early childhood and special education than to those preparing for general elementary or secondary teaching (Epstein, Sanders, & Clark, 1999; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997);
- The majority of information on family-school partnering is “infused” as topics in existing courses as opposed to “standalone” courses (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez, 1997);
- Many current faculty did not receive formal family partnering coursework or skill development in their own training (Wright, Daniel, & Himelreich, 2000);
- Higher education faculty members who are interested in developing strategic and integrated family-school partnering coursework have limited support or resources to do so (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997).

In summarizing these findings, Epstein, Sanders, and Clark (1999) further point out that there is “a dramatic gap” at most schools, colleges, and departments of education between beliefs about the importance for educators to conduct effective family partnerships and graduates’ reports of feeling prepared to work effectively with students’ families and communities. A recent Colorado study of such beliefs and practices reported by school psychologists summarized by Jakubowski, Miller, Hughes, Nguyen, and West (2011) found a similar “belief to practice gap” about family-school partnering. Key challenges raised were similar to those found in national surveys of higher education faculty – time, logistics, perceptions of support, and communication.

The Current Project

In order to understand how future educators in Colorado currently are trained to work with families, a research team of professors, a graduate student, and a Colorado Department of Education employee was assembled. The associated work on this project, tied to Objective 5.5 of the Colorado SPDG, was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1: Literature and Background Analysis

Initially, during the fall of 2011, a comprehensive literature review and background analysis of state source materials related to family school partnering and the training of future educational professionals was conducted. To the team’s knowledge, there had not been any previous review of family-school partnering educator requirements, information, and resources in the state of Colorado. This search followed procedures outlined in several prior studies of higher education practices regarding the preparation of educators to work with families (Broussard 2000; Epstein, Sanders & Clark, 1999; Flanigan, 2005; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). A web-based review was conducted of (a) educator licensing requirements for general and special education teachers, administrators, and related service providers; (b) resources provided by key units/offices housed at the Colorado Department of Education; (c) guidelines associated with relevant educational professional organizations; and (d) undergraduate and graduate educator preparation program offerings at various state Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). Across each of these sources, key findings regarding educator preparation for work with families are summarized in Table 2. (Insert Table 2.)

Table 2: Colorado Family-School Partnering Resource Review

Area Explored	Key Findings
<p>Colorado Educator Licensing Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>General Education Teachers</i> • <i>Special Education Teachers</i> • <i>Administrators</i> • <i>Related Services Providers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing requirements include competency for educators to communicate and collaborate with families in all positions checked. • There is variability in the specificity of the language ranging from teachers (PBSCT, Standard 5.05(8), <i>Communicate with parents and guardians effectively in order to involve them as participants and partners in student learning</i> to specialists/related services requirements, which might cite numerous actions (example: School Psychologist, 11.06(8)).
<p>Colorado Department of Education: Selected Units/Offices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dropout Prevention</i> • <i>Exceptional Student Leadership</i> • <i>Gifted and Talented Education</i> • <i>Office of School Improvement and Turnaround</i> • <i>Language, Culture, and Equity</i> • <i>Early Childhood Initiatives</i> • <i>Academic and Instructional Support</i> • <i>Teaching and Learning</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the eight units reviewed, five (63%) had information/resources for parents; two (25%) offered specific guidance for educators or higher education in practicing family-school partnering. • Only the Office of School Improvement and Turnaround described specific family-school partnering expectations within an RtI framework and offered specific resources.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Professional Organization Guidelines*: • <i>CASB</i> • <i>CASE</i> • <i>CEA</i> • <i>SACPIE</i> • <i>CSBE</i> • <i>CO Head Start Coalition</i> • <i>CO Early Childhood Leadership Commission</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two of the seven organizations/boards provided information stressing the importance of partnering with families. • None directly resourced materials for developing family-school partnering practices.
<p>Colorado Institutions of Higher Education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Forty three accredited higher education departments were identified</i> • <i>These departments housed 101 associated educator preparation programs</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on a course title review of all identified programs, 16% were found to offer a “standalone” family-school partnering course. • However, it was not possible to further assess the content of such courses, nor was it possible to identify how family school partnering was infused into other program courses.

Key: *CASB* – Colorado Association of School Boards; *CASE* – Colorado Association of School Executives; *CEA* – Colorado Education Association; *SACPIE* – State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (this information was found in CO Senate Bill 09-90); *CSBE* – Colorado State Board of Education

This review provided invaluable information regarding the current Colorado climate for training future professionals in family-school partnering. Based upon this review, it was concluded that:

- Most Colorado educator licensing requirements and professional educator organizations stress the need for some level of familiarity with family-school partnering, however competencies are typically stated in general terms and are unique to specific educator disciplines;
- It may be challenging for practicing educators or higher education faculty to easily access information or pertinent resources on family-school partnering from existing Colorado Department of Education units/offices or from professional organization guidelines; and
- Accredited Colorado educator-training programs appear to have topical course offerings that relate to family-school partnering. However, only a few standalone courses on this topic were noted and it was difficult to ascertain how such content is infused into other courses based on this title review alone.

It was concluded, however, that a website review of this nature was limited in its ability to accurately gauge educator preparation, content, and program requirements in family-school partnering preparation. As Broussard (2000) has previously noted, web information does not always portray the details and interrelationships of various topics because of navigation difficulties and differences in presentation complexity and formats. Thus, it was decided that the information obtained from the initial review would be supplemented by a survey designed to further assess the scope and content of educator preparation trends in Colorado.

Phase 2: Survey Development and Analysis

In Phase 2 of the project, an educator training survey was developed collaboratively by the research team. Based on the information analyzed in Phase 1, the overarching goal of the survey was to more fully investigate how future educational professionals in Colorado are trained to partner with families. To capture current pre-service trends, practices, and preferences regarding family school partnering it was decided that the survey would be sent to department leaders at all accredited educator training programs at CO IHEs. There were three main objectives for the survey:

- Objective 1: To determine the current status and identified course offerings designed to prepare future educators to partner with families.

- Objective 2: To assess higher education faculty views, professional interests, and perceived information needs regarding educator preparation in family-school partnering that will be most beneficial and utilized.
- Objective 3: To identify preferred content and venues to deliver family-school partnering resources that can be used to guide future CDE professional development efforts.

Survey Participants. Based on CDE records, 43 accredited educator departments and 101 associated programs were identified. For the purpose of this study, a department was defined as a large, overarching education division within a college or university that had many associated programs responsible for the preparation of general and special education teachers, administrators, and related service providers such as school counselors, social workers or school psychologists. Once these departments were identified, online information was used to gather contact information for all current department leaders. Leaders at educational institutions included department heads, chairpersons, coordinators, or deans, depending on the institution.

Survey Construction. The survey content and format was guided by previous surveys similarly developed to assess how future educators are prepared to work with families (Broussard, 2000; Chavkin, 2005; Epstein, Sanders, & Clark, 1999; Flanigan, C.B., 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997; Wright, Daniel, & Himelreich, 2000). Research-based best practices in family-school partnering consistently linked to improvements in student outcomes also guided survey content (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The survey consisted of two sections: one completed by faculty members who taught classes within a program, the other completed by identified department leaders. Participants were given the following definition of family-school partnering to consider.

Family-school partnering is the collaboration of families and schools as equal partners in improving learner, classroom, school, and district outcomes. In effective partnering, each stakeholder shares responsibility for learners' success by: (a) establishing and sustaining trusting relationships, (b) understanding and integrating family and school culture, (c) maintaining reciprocal communication, (d) engaging in

collaborative problem-solving, (e) coordinating learning at home, school, and in the community, and (f) acknowledging and celebrating progress (Colorado Department of Education, 2010).

Participants were then asked to complete a series of multiple-choice questions directed at current practice (6 items), personal perceptions (4 items), and next steps regarding the types of resources and venues needed to develop future pre-service training (2 items). There were also two open-ended items where participants were asked to share ideas about initiating statewide interest groups and to identify helpful resources on this topic. Department leaders were asked several additional questions about program demographics, required coursework and field experiences, perceptions of what helps students feel prepared, and ideas about barriers or challenges faced when preparing students to work collaboratively with families. (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey.)

Procedures. All research procedures for the survey's administration were approved by the Internal Review Board at the University of Denver. Once IRB approval was received, the survey was e-mailed by the Colorado Department of Education using a Survey Monkey format to all previously identified department leaders. These persons were asked to complete both sections of the survey and to then forward the survey to respective program faculty in their department. Follow-up emails were sent one and two months later. After two months, any departments that had not had at least one respondent were identified. A personal phone call was made to the identified department head by the student researcher who asked for their participation.

Results

A total of 38 useable surveys were returned. Out of the 43 departments that received the survey, 27 (63%) had at least one respondent. Nine of the 38 surveys (23%) were filled out by chairpersons, coordinators, directors, or deans. Twenty (52%) were completed by faculty from general teacher education programs, 4 (11%) by faculty from special education programs, 7 (18%) by faculty from administrator programs, and 7 (18%) by faculty from related service provider programs (i.e., school psychology, school counseling, or school social work). When examining the geographical profile of the

38 respondents, 29 (76%) were received from schools in urban areas, with 4 (11%) and 5 (13%) received from rural and online schools, respectively.

Key findings are summarized below in regards to the three identified survey objectives. Results are reported as percentages based on the number of responses to each question since some participants chose not to answer certain questions. Differential proportions are noted across the four educator disciplines (i.e., general education, special education, administration, and related service providers) and three different types of institutions that participated (i.e., urban, rural, and on-line schools).

Objective 1: To determine the current status and identified course offerings designed to prepare future educators to partner with families.

Faculty were asked if family-school partnering was part of their curricula (90% indicated yes), and if so, how was this content was taught. The majority of respondents indicated that family-school partnering topics were infused (70%) versus taught as a standalone course (17%), with one respondent reporting both (3%). Participants also were asked to indicate which family-school partnering topics were covered in current coursework of any nature. Across all respondents, the five topics selected most often and least often were identified and are displayed in Table 3 below. These results were fairly consistent across program type and geographical location. When variation was noted it could be directly attributable to the expectations for that discipline (i.e., faculty in teacher education programs indicated more focus on parent-teacher conferences). (Insert Table 3.)

Table 3: Most and Least Frequently Reported Course Content Across Respondents

Most Frequently Reported Course Content	Least Frequently Reported Course Content
1. Building Relationships with Families (93%)	1. Designing Effective and Interactive Homework with Families (14%)
2. Creating Welcoming Environments for Families (80%)	2. Home-School Academic Strategies (Reading, Math, Writing, Content Areas) (28%)
3. Working with Culturally and Linguistically	3. Home-School Behavior Strategies

Diverse Families (79%)	(Organization, Work Completion, School Attendance (28%))
4. Research Supporting the Impact of Family-School Partnering Academic Outcomes (66%)	4. Including Families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (28%)
5. Research Supporting the Impact of Family-School Partnering on Social, Emotional, & Behavioral Outcomes (66%)	5. Effective Homework and Home-School Support Strategies (38%)

Since a key SPDG goal is to increase the meaningful participation of families in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports that integrates RtI and PBIS approaches, participants were asked two specific questions about working with families within each of these frameworks. Overall, 48% of the respondents reported that their students received some or extensive exposure to RtI and PBIS family-school partnering. Again some variability was noted between professional disciplines, with faculty who taught special education and related service providers reporting more extensive exposure than that offered to students in administrator or general education programs. Only 20% of administrator and 29% of general education faculty reported the inclusion of family-school practices in regards to RtI and PBIS, while 50% and 75% of special education and related service provider faculty, respectively, reported such practices. Overall, many respondents requested more information on how to best include families in RtI (64%) and PBIS (56%). However, the request for such information was lowest for faculty who trained related service providers, presumably since these professionals are often in charge of such processes at the schools they serve.

Objective 2: To assess higher education faculty views, professional interests, and perceived information needs regarding educator preparation in family-school partnering that will be most beneficial and utilized.

Faculty were asked to rate their familiarity with current research on family-school partnering. Most (i.e., 87% of respondents) rated themselves as familiar or highly familiar with the current research on family-school partnering. However, only 38% reported having some or extensive training in their own

graduate work. These percentages also differed across disciplines with general education faculty reporting minimal or no prior training and over half of the special education faculty responding they did have training in family-school partnering during their pre-service program. In addition, participants were asked to give their perspective on how well prepared their students feel about work with families. Again a large majority of the total respondents (i.e., 83%) believe that their students would feel either “somewhat” or “very” prepared to work with families. These results were consistent across different educator disciplines and type of training institution.

Finally, participants were asked about their impression of the importance of offering family-school partnering content as a standalone course. There was an almost even division between those who said such a course would be “very” or “somewhat important”(49%) and those who said that having a standalone course was a “little” or “not at all important” (52%). While this perception seems evenly divided, it should be noted that the proportion of respondents who indicated a standalone course would be “very or somewhat important” (49%) was more than double the proportion who reported having such a course (21%).

Objective 3: To identify preferred content and venues to deliver family-school partnering resources that can be used to guide future CDE professional development efforts.

Respondents were asked to check the types of venues and resources that would be most helpful personally and in terms of developing future coursework on family-school partnering. In regards to the first issue, across all participants, *websites* (80%), *webinars* (69%), and *information at meetings or conferences* (62%) were selected as the most desired type of resource venue that could be provided by the Colorado Department of Education. Some differences were noted across institutional location with more faculty members in rural areas indicating that *webinars*, *websites* and *handouts* were the most preferred type of resource, presumably because these are easy to access without traveling to urban areas.

In regards to preferred future resources, participants were asked to indicate from a list of 20 research-based family-school partnering topics, those that would be most helpful in the future development of partnering coursework. Respondents were able to select as many topics as desired. Overall, 40% of the respondents indicated they would like more information across each of the 20 listed topics. However, one

topic was consistently requested by over 80% of the respondents: “*Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes*”. Minor differences in topic preferences were noted across disciplines. Faculty from rural institutions were more likely to request information on legal mandates for working with families, the use of two-way communication, and how to work more effectively with diverse families. Interestingly, faculty from on-line institutions proportionately asked for more information about building relationships, creating welcoming environments, and problem solving with families around student success. Please refer to Table 4 for a complete list of selected topics across all respondents in a descending order of preference. (Insert Table 4.)

Table 4: Topics Requested to Further Develop Family-School Partnering Coursework

Future Topic Categories	N=25
1. Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes	80%
2. Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on social, emotional, & behavioral outcomes	68%
3. Including families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)	64%
4. Home-school behavior strategies (organization, work completion, school attendance)	60%
5. Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families	56%
6. Home-school academic strategies (reading, math, writing, content areas)	56%
7. Effective homework and home-school support strategies	56%
8. Including families in Response to Intervention (RtI)	56%
9. Legal mandates for working and teaching with families	52%
10. Educating families in coordinating learning between home & school	52%
11. Designing effective and interactive homework with families	52%
12. Benefits of family partnering for teachers, administrators, families,	52%

students	
13. Collaborating with families on RtI (Response to Intervention) problem-solving or special education teams	48%
14. Problem-solving with families around student success	48%
15. Conflict resolution and effective listening skills for working with families	48%
16. Using two-way home-school communication	44%
17. Barriers to family-school partnering	44%
18. Building relationships with families	40%
19. Creating welcoming environments for families	40%
20. Conducting family-teacher conferences	40%

Finally, in two open-ended questions faculty were asked to provide partnering resources they have found helpful and to make suggestions regarding the formation of statewide family-school partnering interest groups. A list of responses to these questions can be found in Appendix B and C, respectively.

Discussion

The present results are similar in nature to prior reports calling for an increase in pre-service and in-service family-school partnering training at all levels – elementary, middle, and high school (de Acosta, M. 1994; Epstein, Sanders, and Clark, 1999; Flanigan, 2005; Harris, Jacobson, & Hemmer, 2004; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). In the present study, a survey was developed to capture the current climate in Colorado regarding the pre-service preparation of educators to work collaboratively with families. The results clearly indicate there is a desire and need for more widespread educator pre-service professional development concerning family-school partnering. The significance of these results is bolstered by the fact that responses were obtained from at least one faculty member at the majority of identified accredited institutions of higher education currently preparing educators in the state of Colorado.

Faculty at these educator preparation programs were fairly evenly divided in viewing the need for a standalone family-school partnering course similar to that reported in previous studies (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). However, while, such content is now largely infused into existing coursework, a higher percentage of respondents indicated they believe a standalone family-school partnering course was important than those who reported having one. This might indicate a desire to have more focused family-school partnering curriculum choices when preparing future educators than currently available. The present results also are comparable to previous surveys of this nature in that slightly less than half of the respondents reported having training in family-school partnering during their own pre-service program (Wright, Daniel, & Himelreich, 2000). Such findings point to the need for strategic efforts to support current and new higher education faculty members in this arena.

Faculty reports of family-school topics presently covered and requested also provide ideas that can guide future coursework and practice experiences. The family-school partnering topics reportedly infused into coursework are of a broad nature (e.g., *building relationships with families; creating welcoming environments*) while more explicit research-based strategies for supporting learning at home (e.g., *designing effective and interactive homework with families; home-school academic and behavioral strategies*) are being taught less frequently. Faculty also indicated a need to gain more access to current and relevant information related to two important reform initiatives in Colorado: RtI and PBIS. These results correspond to other studies indicating that supervising field teachers are largely unaware of contemporary evidence-based family-school partnering practices (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010a). Such findings suggest a need to find ways to further infuse pre-service training on critical family-school partnering practices known to have a positive influence on student outcomes in regards to both academic and social-emotional learning (Hirsch, Sioberg, & Germuth, 2011; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

Finally, these results can be used to guide potential next steps to enhance educator preparation in family-school partnering. A majority of respondents indicated that websites, webinars, and conference presentations would be preferred venues for accessing family-school partnering information. As such, these venues should be considered in all future recommended CDE actions. The fact that all 20 listed

research-based topics were selected by over 40% of the respondents as being of interest also supports the need to provide further educator resources.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted when discussing the implications of this study. The survey was distributed to department leaders identified on the basis of a web-based search. While every attempt was made to identify correct email addresses of key department leaders this information can often be hard to determine from websites and it is often the case that such leadership may be in flux and not regularly updated. The identified leaders were asked to complete the survey and to then forward it to faculty in all relevant associated educator programs. Since dissemination was contingent on the compliance of these leaders, there was no way for the researchers to know how many faculty actually received the survey in order to know more precisely who chose versus declined to respond. Furthermore, there were some departments at IHEs that chose not to participate. Thus, the unclear distribution and overall lower response rate may limit the generalizations that can be made regarding how to support future educator preparation in family-school partnering. However, it is important to note that 67% of all identified accredited IHEs in Colorado were represented by at least one faculty response which increases the representativeness of the sample. A final limitation concerns potential problems in the interpretation of certain survey content. Indeed, since there was no definition provided for the concept “infuse”, interpretations based on this issue may be clouded by variability in faculty interpretation of what it means to infuse family-school partnering issues into course content.

Recommendations

Short-term and long-term recommendations are forwarded to support the future training of Colorado educators to partner with families. These recommendations honor the choices for topics and venues identified by our survey respondents. Sustainable avenues to enhance educator preparation in family-school partnering is best achieved by collaboration across disciplines and by moving beyond classroom-based teaching to supervised field experiences in working with families (Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011).

Short-Term Recommendations: The following suggestions are offered as recommendations that might be implemented in the next year.

1. Provide every CO IHE faculty who prepare future educators a link to the summary of survey results, together with a brief annotated bibliography of state and national resources on family-school partnering research and pre-service/in-service professional development models.
2. Create a CDE centralized website location for higher education information/resources on family-school partnering which could be continually developed over time and could include sample syllabi (numerous respondents volunteered to share), suggested texts, and key articles. Focus initially on resources for the most requested topics:
 - *Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes;*
 - *Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes;*
 - *Including families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports;*
 - *Home-school behavior strategies (organization, work completion, school attendance);*
 - *Home-school academic strategies (reading, math, writing, content areas);*
 - *Including families in Response to Intervention;*
 - *Effective homework and home-school support strategies;*
 - *Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families.*
3. Work with CDE departments to further link educator and higher education information on partnering with families so that aligned resources and research are readily available at the state level.
4. Identify key state-level professional conferences attended by educators during the year and work with sponsors to submit proposals that summarize research-based family-school partnering essential skills and content for higher education that is tied to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (RtI and PBIS).

5. Create a way for IHE faculty to access a newly developed CDE online course, titled: *Family, School, & Community Partnering: Multi-tiered System of Supports*, so as to begin aligning pre-service and in-service training.
6. Invite IHE faculty to regional CDE *Family, School, & Community Partnering: "On the Team and At the Table" Stakeholder Trainings*, so as to begin aligning pre-service and in-service training.
7. Follow-up is needed with faculty respondents who volunteered syllabi and resources and who expressed an interest in joining future study groups of educator interested in family-school partnering educator preparation in Colorado.
8. Include all IHE department leaders in the distribution of CDE updates regarding the research, resources, and implementation of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports and ask that these links be shared with all program faculty.
9. Share these results with the members of the recently formulated *Colorado Family-School Community of Practice (CoP)*, a statewide group of educators, families, and community members who meets monthly to participate in shared learning related to supporting effective, research-based family-school partnering in every Colorado school with the goal of improving student outcomes (Colorado Department of Education, 2011).
10. Tie these findings into current CDE efforts to develop new regulations and licensure definitions related to the recently passed CO Educator Effectiveness law (Colorado Department of Education, 2011) since these regulations will drive IHE curriculum in the future.

Long-term Recommendations: The following recommendations are offered as suggestions for consideration over the long-term to potentially guide future actions during the second and third year of SPDG funding (2013-2014).

1. Convene an "interest group" of higher education faculty representatives to discuss the issue, creating a forum for sharing knowledge, challenges, solutions, and best practices possibly by providing a venue for ongoing virtual conversation and tap those respondents who expressed an interest in pursuing such further study to help facilitate this effort.

2. Develop sample student, faculty, and supervising field supervisor feedback for assessing program preparation effectiveness in family-school partnering.
3. Study model programs and identify relevant competencies related to student outcomes and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports.
4. Offer guidance to how best to infuse topics strategically into existing curricula and/or develop integrated standalone courses.
5. Identify strategies to link programs and disciplines within an institution.
6. Explore alternative venues for incorporating essential skills and knowledge – such as online courses, required seminars or workshops, practicum or field placement requirements.
7. Create a webinar focused on most often requested family-school partnering topics, models for higher education, and alignment with Colorado Multi-Tiered System of Supports (RtI and PBIS); present on multiple occasions and archive.
8. Send information about this survey and CDE, national resources on family-school partnering to various local professional organizations such as CASE, CASB, and CEA, with a sample posting frame and applicable resources to help align the work for all stakeholders, ultimately benefitting our Colorado educators, families, and students.
9. Tie these findings into all long-term CDE efforts focused on the development of future regulations and licensure definitions related to the CO Educator Effectiveness law (Colorado Department of Education, 2011) since these regulations will drive IHE curriculum in the future.

Conclusion

The Colorado Department of Education has recently received a federal State Professional Development Grant to bring to scale initiatives focused on improving the outcomes of students with disabilities through the implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (i.e., Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)). This project is associated with one of the seven goals of this multiyear effort, specifically, Objective 5.5, which is aimed at increasing future educators' meaningful participation with families. The results reported here not only

support the shift from traditional parent involvement to family-school partnering but also can be used to guide future short-term and long-term recommendations to ensure that family-school partnering practices become an integral component in the preparation of future Colorado educators. The significance of these results is bolstered by the fact responses were obtained from at least one faculty member at a majority of the accredited Colorado institutions of higher education currently preparing future educators.

This work aligns with several other Colorado educational reform initiatives currently underway, specifically the implementation of a Response to Intervention framework (Colorado Department of Education, 2008a,b, 2009) and the integration of family partnering efforts into various ongoing programs such as drop-out prevention, early childhood, and special education (Colorado Department of Education, 2011a). Further attention to pre-service training in family-school partnering is a critical component of the new *Rules for Administration of a Statewide System to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Licensed Personnel Employed by School Districts and Boards of Cooperative Services* (i.e., Senate Bill 10-191) recently passed by the Colorado General Assembly and State Board of Education (Colorado Department of Education, 2011b). This legislation includes several specific references to student and family perceptions of family-school partnering (i.e., Section 7.0 - Parent and Student Partnerships with Teachers and Public School Administrators). Thus, in the near future, as these regulations are adopted by Colorado school districts, it is likely that educators' performance evaluations will include an expectation of family-school engagement, thus increasing the need for and relevance of pre-service training in family-school partnering.

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Appendix A
Survey
Colorado State Personnel Development Grant
2011

INTRODUCTION

The following survey is being sent to you as a component of the Colorado Department of Education's State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) from the U.S. Department of Education.

In this survey, you will be asked about your current offerings, personal perceptions, and ideas for future practice in regards to preparing future educators to work with families. Please see the attached introductory letter for more specific information. Thank you in advance for your time and ideas in completing this questionnaire.

All survey responses will be kept confidential and only shared with those persons directly involved in working on this grant. However, they will not be kept anonymous for reasons of follow-up and provision of materials, participating in further study or interest groups, and/or development of resources related to this topic.

PROGRAM OR DEPARTMENT CHAIR/COORDINATOR/DIRECTOR/DEAN:

If you are the head of a program or department, please fill out all parts of the survey (1, 2, and 3), and forward on to your faculty. If you feel that we have not sent this survey to the correct person(s), please let us know that and forward it on the appropriate staff.

FACULTY MEMBER:

If you are a faculty member (not a program or department chair), please fill out Parts 1 and 2.

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERING DEFINITION:

For the purpose of this survey, the definition of family-school partnering is as follows:
Family-school partnering is the collaboration of families and schools as equal partners in improving learner, classroom, school, and district outcomes. In effective partnering, each stakeholder shares responsibility for learners' success by: (a) establishing and sustaining trusting relationships, (b) understanding and integrating family and school culture, (c) maintaining reciprocal communication, (d) engaging in collaborative problem-solving, (e) coordinating learning at home, school, and in the community, and (f) acknowledging and celebrating progress. (Colorado Department of Education, 2010)

PART 1: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Name (Optional):

2. Current Institution:

3. Years working at this institution:

4. Current teaching field:

- Administration
- General Teacher Education
- Special Education
- Early Childhood
- Related school service provider (OT/PT, school psychologist, etc)
- Other

5. Total years teaching in higher education:

PART 2: FACULTY INFORMATION

All Faculty Members and Program/Department Chairs please complete the following sections

Current Practice

6. Do you currently teach a course(s) that focuses entirely on family-school partnering or do you infuse family-school partnering topics into other curricula?

___ No

___ Yes; Infuse topics into existing courses

___ Yes; Standalone course name:

7. If yes to teaching family-school partnering or infused courses, please indicate which family-school partnering topics are addressed in this/these course(s). Please choose all that apply.

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on social, emotional, and behavioral student outcomes

Legal mandates for working and teaching with families

Building relationships with families

Educating families in coordinating learning between home and school

Using two-way home-school communication

Creating welcoming environments for families

Conducting family-teacher conferences

Collaborating with families on RtI (Response to Intervention) problem-solving or special education teams

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families

Home-school academic strategies (reading, math, writing, content areas)

Home-school behavior strategies (organization, work completion, school attendance)

Effective homework and home-school support strategies

Designing effective and interactive homework with families

Problem-solving with families around student success

Conflict resolution and effective listening skills for working with families

Benefits of family partnering for teachers, administrators, families, students

Barriers to family-school partnering

Including families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Including families in Response to Intervention (RtI)

Other (please specify)

8. If you answered yes to teaching standalone or infused courses on family-school partnering, would you be willing to share syllabi that you currently use? If so, please indicate a preferred email address.

No

Yes; preferred email:

9. How much exposure do your students receive in working with families in the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) process in their coursework?

None A little Some Extensive

10. How much exposure do your students receive in working with families in the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) process in their coursework?

None A little Some Extensive

Personal Perception

11. How would you rate your familiarity with the current research on family-school partnering?

None A little Some Extensive

12. In your graduate work, how much training did you have on the topic of family-school partnering?

None A little Some Extensive

13. How important is it for your program to have a standalone course in family-school partnering?

None A little Some Extensive

14. How well prepared do you think your students feel they are to work with families?

None A little Some Extensive

Next Steps

15. The Colorado Department of Education is currently collecting and developing research-based resources on family-school partnering for practicing and future educators. Please indicate which of the following types of resources would be most helpful to you and your program. Please choose all that apply.

Webinars

List serves

Websites

Handouts

Face-to-face professional development, trainings

Availability of other IHE syllabi (“syllabi library”)

Online courses

Online Community of Practice (Cop), blog, or interest group

Information at professional meetings or conferences

Other (please specify)

16. What topic information or resources would be helpful to you in potentially developing a course or inserting topics into current classes? Please choose all that apply.

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on social, emotional, and behavioral student outcomes

Legal mandates for working and teaching with families

Building relationships with families

Educating families in coordinating learning between home and school

Using two-way home-school communication

Creating welcoming environments for families

Conducting family-teacher conferences

Collaborating with families on RtI (Response to Intervention) problem-solving or special education teams

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families

Home-school academic strategies (reading, math, writing, content areas)

Home-school behavior strategies (organization, work completion, school attendance)

Effective homework and home-school support strategies

Designing effective and interactive homework with families

Problem-solving with families around student success

Conflict resolution and effective listening skills for working with families

Benefits of family partnering for teachers, administrators, families, students

Barriers to family-school partnering

Including families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

| Including families in Response to Intervention (RtI)

Other (please specify)

17. Would you be interested in participating in a statewide IHE interest or focus group on training future educators in family-school partnering if such were to be formed?

___ No

___ Yes; preferred email:

18. If yes to the previous question, please share any ideas on how such groups might be formed and/or be helpful to faculty and/or students:

19. Please share any resources you have found helpful in training future educators in family-school partnering:

PART 3: INFORMATION FOR PROGRAM OR DEPARTMENT CHAIR/COORDINATOR/DIRECTOR/DEAN

Please only fill out these questions if you are a program or department director/coordinator/chair/dean.

Current Practice

20. Thank you for forwarding this survey on to your faculty members. For our records, how many persons in your department will be receiving this survey?

21. Please indicate if your program/department offers:

___ Undergraduate degrees

___ Graduate degrees

___ Both undergraduate and graduate degrees

22. On average, how many students does your program graduate per academic year?

Less than 5

6-20

20-50

< 50

23. Does your program currently offer course(s) that focus entirely on family-school partnering or that infuse family-school partnering topics into existing curricula?

No

Yes; Infuse topics into existing courses

Yes; Standalone course name:

24. If yes to the previous question, please indicate which family-school partnering topics are addressed in this/these course(s). Please choose all that apply.

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on academic outcomes

Research supporting the impact of family-school partnering on social, emotional, and behavioral student outcomes

Legal mandates for working and teaching with families

Building relationships with families

Educating families in coordinating learning between home and school

Using two-way home-school communication

Creating welcoming environments for families

Conducting family-teacher conferences

Collaborating with families on RtI (Response to Intervention) problem-solving or special education teams

Working with culturally and linguistically diverse families

Home-school academic strategies (reading, math, writing, content areas)

Home-school behavior strategies (organization, work completion, school attendance)

Effective homework and home-school support strategies

Designing effective and interactive homework with families
Problem-solving with families around student success

Conflict resolution and effective listening skills for working with families

Benefits of family partnering for teachers, administrators, families, students

Barriers to family-school partnering

Including families in Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

| Including families in Response to Intervention (RtI)

Other (please specify)

25. During required field experiences (such as practicum or student teaching) are specific family-school partnering experiences required?

___ No

___ Yes; Please describe:

26. If you have a graduate program, please estimate how many masters theses or doctoral dissertations on families or family-school partnering have been completed in the past three years:

Personal Perception

27. What do you think helps your students feel well prepared to work collaboratively with families?

Next Steps

28. If any, please list possible barriers or challenges you see in preparing your program students to work collaboratively with families?

Thank you for your participation. If you have any other information to add, questions, or suggestions, please feel free to write them below. Additionally, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please contact any of the people listed below.

29. Please check below whether or not you would like to receive results from this survey:

___ No

___ Yes; preferred email:

Appendix B

Resources Respondents Have Found Helpful in Training Future Educators in Family-School Partnering

Epstein; School district parent school liaisons
I've been pulling extensive research and models on this for another project; will be happy to share once that project is completed in fall
Various articles and chapters in text books
Fellow faculty members
Action research...I have worked with school officials who were concerned with the lack of academic success of a particular subgroup; we brought the students and their parents in separately and asked them why they/their children were struggling; it was the first time the school had taken the time to ask; prior practice focused on responsibility deferment ("They don't come to parent-teacher conferences because they do not value education") and that switched to an attitude focused on what the school CAN do to make it more inviting to this subgroup
Various books and research available online
PEAK Parent Center resources
Harvard Family Research Project; Colorado Department of Education: RtI/PBIS Family, School, and Community Partnering Training and Toolkit; <i>The Power of Family-School Partnering (FSP)</i> by Lines, Miller, and Arthur-Stanley; Futures in School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships
http://www.centeroninstruction.org/response-to-intervention-rti-a-primer-for-parents http://www.nclد.org/images/stories/Publications/AdvocacyBriefs/ParentGuide-RTI/ParentsGuidetoRTI.pdf http://www.centeroninstruction.org/put-reading-first-helping-your-child-learn-to-read---a-parent-guide
Epstein's framework has been useful; also family-centered planning
<i>Home and School Relations</i> text by Glenn Olsen and M.L. Fuller; Southeastern Developmental Labs publications (<i>New Wave of Evidence</i> , School-Family Connection, Diversity); Epstein's School, Family and Community Partnerships

Deborah Leucovius - PACER Center; Beach Center - KU including Michael Wehmeyer, the Turnbolls,
Rashida Banerje

Webinars most helpful; expertise within the local districts are helpful

Harvard's Family Involvement site; <http://www.coparentcoalition.org/index.php?ref=resources>; PTA

Appendix C

Suggestions for Forming and Using Statewide IHE Interest Group

Making sure to have diverse perspectives and experiences represented
Create a virtual group so that all regions can participate
I suggest forming groups across the state so all have opportunities to attend; I suggest inviting parents who are active in school-community partnerships
It would be helpful to have some meetings in Southwest Colorado, instead of all in Denver
The groups should be geographically diverse and include representatives from K-college level to get the full scope of family partnerships; the groups need to meet in various locations to give access to all, mileage compensation is always appreciated
I am currently on the State Advisory Board for Parent Involvement (SACPIE); I think it would be nice if we could combine efforts
Maybe interested faculty in various specialization areas; use existing organizations and specialty groups
The current process seems to work
Contact university for faculty names